



***K12 Online Conference 2006***  
**Overcoming Obstacles: Selling Web 2.0 To Senior Management**  
***Presented by***  
**Terry Freedman**

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## Preamble

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The numbers in brackets after some of the headings indicates the timing of that section within the podcast.

Terry Freedman publishes the Educational Technology: ICT in Education website, <http://www.ictineducation.org>.

## Introduction [0.32]

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Do you sometimes feel like you're just not getting through? To colleagues, your supervisor, even parents? You're convinced of the benefits of Web 2.0 applications like blogging and wikis, but how do you convince others? Especially if you're new to teaching or have just started in a new job. How do you not only get others to listen to you, but to actually take up some of your suggestions – or at least give you the freedom to do so?

In this presentation we'll be considering:

- The 8 General Principles of Presenting New Ideas
- The 3 main areas of concern about blogging, which I'm going to use as a kind of shorthand for all the other Web 2.0 tools, and how to deal with them.
- Seven proactive things you can do to get the management (or other influential people) on your side.
- Four reasons why a supportive management is not always a good thing.
- Four ways to get a supportive administration or leadership team working with you rather than against you.
- Three things to do if you're too late and blogging has already been banned.

## Who is this resource for?

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So, who is the presentation for? It's aimed at technology co-ordinators, and ICT managers, who want to implement Web 2.0 tools like blogging in what is, perhaps, a fairly conservative environment. The names given to such people are many and varied. In a nutshell, the target audience is the person who is responsible for the management of educational technology within and throughout the school.

My presentation takes you through a series of logical steps which I have found to be extremely effective in the management of change.

I hope you enjoy the presentation and find it useful.

## What does the resource or presentation comprise?

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There are three components of this presentation:

- A podcast, which covers the main points in an almost bullet point style, apart from a discussion about objection analysis which takes place. The purpose of the podcast is to get your mental juices flowing in preparation for reading this document, or to summarise the main points for you after you've read this document. It also gives you an opportunity to eavesdrop on the sort of discussion that you yourself would probably find very useful to have.
- This document, which goes into more depth whilst retaining the bullet point style.

- Finally, of course, there is you. I would strongly recommend that rather than listen to the whole podcast in one go, you think about each section in advance, and maybe even jot down a few notes about what you think might be covered. Be a proactive reader and listener.

### The 8 General Principles of Presenting New Ideas [3.39]

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Let's start with some general principles for presenting new ideas.

#### Principle #1: Be prepared

As Benjamin Franklin said: "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." You need to be prepared at all stages of the proceedings: at the beginning, when you ought to prepare an objection analysis, then when you collate your information and then summarise it for a talk or document or other kind of presentation for the group of people you need to convince, then for the implementation phase and then on the reporting stage.

What do I mean by these stages and terms?

- Objection analysis is where you try to work out in advance what the likely objections will be, and head them off at the pass. I'll be saying more about this later on.
- Preparing the information is covered under Principle #4: Everyone is busy, whilst collating the information is covered under Principle #3: Everybody wants something, and Principle #5: Know your stuff.
- Having an implementation plan is covered in Principle #6: Have a plan.
- The reporting stage, which also implies an evaluation stage, is, as the term implies, where you let people know how it's been going, ie how successful it's been, or what needs to happen to ensure further progress. That's also covered in Principle #6.

#### Principle #2: Nobody likes an evangeliser

OK, that's a little bit of an exaggeration, of course, but the point is that people who are passionate about something can sometimes come across as fanatics. I heard a great definition of a fanatic once, from someone called Vincent Snell, who was the national leader for Transcendental Meditation in England and one of the most down-to-earth people you could possibly meet. He once defined a fanatic as someone who drank peppermint tea – and expected everyone else to.

It's the same with smokers who give up smoking. You can always tell who they are: not only do they start coughing as soon as someone 50 yards away reaches for a cigarette pack, the moment someone lights up they go into lecture mode, quoting a Google-ful of gruesome statistics intended to convince you to give up smoking instantly. Do such tactics work? Well, I never found them to: the main effect is to make other people avoid you whenever possible.

What these examples have in common is that the person doing the evangelising in each case has adopted a stance of I'm right and you're wrong. There's no pay-off in doing that, or at least, not the type of pay-off you want. You have to acknowledge that the other person has experience too, and you have to respect that. In one of my jobs I dumped a consultancy agency I'd been using partly because they kept sending along people who had been in teaching for two or three years to talk to and advise headteachers ie principals who had been in the

game for 30 years. That would have been a barrier in itself, though not an insurmountable one, but the clincher was the fact that all of these people had an air of arrogance about them which made real communication impossible.

This is why I always say to people, make haste slowly. "Slowly" doesn't necessarily mean taking a long time. It means going through particular stages in particular ways, and not rushing in like a bull in a china shop.

**Principle #3: Everybody wants to do the best job they can**

You may not believe this. In fact, you may know people who are just treading water until they retire, or who give the impression that they really don't care. Well, maybe they do, and maybe they don't: it's irrelevant. If you believe that people do NOT want to do the best they can, you may as well put these notes away now and get on with something more useful. In order to have any chance at all of convincing anyone to do anything new, you have to at least have a working assumption that they really do want to do the best job they can.

Of course, what that means in practice may not be exactly what **you** might wish for. For example, it may be that the quality of the work done is judged by the percentage of students who gain a particular grade, because that's how the school as a whole is judged. That brings us on to the next principle.

**Principle #4: Everybody wants something**

Well, I know you'll probably think that that shows a very cynical attitude, but as Ambrose Bierce said in The Devil's Dictionary, a cynic is a person who sees things as they **are**, and not as they **ought** to be. Another way of putting this is "What's in it for me?". Find out what your supervisor, for example, wants, and show her how blogging will help her achieve that. If her main immediate goal is to raise academic standards, tell her how blogging can help. But if her main aim is to sort out seemingly intractable discipline problems, telling her how blogging can improve SATs scores is not likely to cut any ice. But let her know of how blogging has helped rein in unruly children, and you're much more likely to be heard.

One caveat: I'm mentioning these examples because I know of cases where they've applied. I am not suggesting for a moment that you lie about anything. What I'm saying is that you have some work to do: find out or work out what your supervisor's aims are, which should be stated in your school's development plan anyway, and find out if and how web 2 tools might help to achieve them.

**Principle #5: Everybody is busy**

When I was a senior officer in a Local Authority, which is the UK equivalent of School Districts, I would insist that my staff present issues to me in no more than one side of A4 or Letter paper. I didn't have the time to read reams of notes on every single issue. Whether you intend to talk to someone, or give them something to read, or both, make it short. It can be done. My supervisor in the same Local Authority wouldn't read anything which was more than half a side long. One of the hardest but best exercises I was ever set was when a university tutor asked us to summarise macro-economic theory in no more than 500 words. I summarised Keynesian economics for my own students in about 100 words. Bullet points can also be highly effective.

That kind of discipline forces you to cut to the chase, and get to the nub of the issue. The spoken equivalent is what they do at business networking meetings:

each person is given 60 seconds to summarise what their business is and what they're looking for. Can you summarise in 60 seconds why your students should be allowed to do blogging in school – and without cheating by speaking at the speed of light? If not, you haven't thought it through properly: go back to the drawing board.

### Principle #6: Know your stuff

Just because you've made your pitch in 60 seconds or one side of paper, does not mean that you don't need any more information. On the contrary: you need lots of information ready to pass on should your hopes be realised and your supervisor says, "Tell me more about..."

### Principle #7: Have a plan

If your boss says "So what would you suggest we do?", or even "I'm convinced: go for it", you need to have an implementation plan. You'll need to know who and when you're going to start, with whom, how much it will cost, how and when you're going to evaluate it, and how and in what format you're going to report on it. That all sounds very formal, but it doesn't necessarily need to be in practice. Basically, what we're saying is that you need to have a routemap in your head about where to go from here.

### Principle #8: Ask for an action

Read any book on sales techniques and it will tell you that you must always close the pitch with a call to action by the prospect, ie the person you're trying to sell to. In this case, you may be asking your supervisor to read something and meet with you next week to discuss it, for example.

Now, you might think that if the boss says, "Go ahead", you don't need them to do anything further. You'd be wrong. Interestingly enough, one of the comments that I kept hearing over and over from people I'd worked with in schools in England, where the aim had been to transform the way the technical support in the school was managed and organised, was that what mattered to them was not merely the support of the headteacher or principal, but their **active and proactive** support. In other words, they **wanted** the headteacher to take an active interest in what they were doing, not simply give them permission to get on with it. Translating that into the scenario we're talking about, a good outcome would be for the boss to ask to meet with you once a month, or once every half-term, to discuss how it's going, and maybe even to contribute to a termly newsletter sent out to parents. You can't guarantee that your supervisor will suggest the action you'd like them to suggest, but you can help matters along by suggesting it for them.

### Summary

So, let's quickly recap these principles of presenting new ideas:

Principle #1 is Be prepared

Principle #2 is Nobody likes an evangeliser

Principle #3 Everybody wants to do the best job they can

Principle #4 is Everybody wants something

Principle #5 is Everybody is busy

Principle #6 is Know your stuff

Principle #7 is Have a plan

Principle #8 is Ask for an action

### **Objection analysis [11:05]**

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One of the things I mentioned under the heading of “be prepared” was something known as “objection analysis”. This is where you put yourselves in the other person’s shoes and try to work out what possible objections they might come up with, and then think of answers to them. This is one of those situations where two heads are definitely better than one, and what I’d like you to listen to next is a discussion I had with my wife along these lines. The scenario was, of course, artificial, but the discussion we had wasn’t, and will give you an idea of the kind of things that might emerge from such a process.

But before you go on to listen to that, why not press the pause button and try and come up with a few ideas yourself? If you were going to try and convince the powers that be in your school to let you start implementing blogging and so on, what objections are they probably going to come up with? What concerns are they likely to express?

Once you’ve started to identify some possible objections, you can start to collate ideas and information about how to answer them. For example, how have other schools or school districts successfully dealt with or avoided the issues raised?

Discussion: [12:24]

### **Four common objections to blogging, and possible solutions [48:18]**

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I hope you found listening to that discussion interesting. Your own objection analysis will probably raise a few different issues. At least it gives you an idea of the sorts of things that can crop up. Even though not all of it directly was about senior managers’ possible objections, the discussion was still potentially useful, because at least we’d thought about other issues. Suppose, for example, my supervisor had said, “Have you thought about what the parents might say?”, I’d be able to say “Yes, and I thought the best way of handling it would be ...”.

So, what are the four objections often expressed about letting students blog etc in school?

#### **Objection #1: Concerns over online safety issues**

Solutions:

- a) Students need to be taught how to be safe online, so simply not letting them blog in school is not a complete answer, because they’re going to be doing it home anyway. You could argue that the school has a duty of care in this respect. In any event, school should be about preparing young people for life “out there”, and the digital world is these days very much a part of daily life.
- b) Within school, blogs could be made inaccessible from outsiders, comments can be moderated, and students required to use aliases. These kinds of measures can provide reassurance, not only to managers but also, of course, to parents and carers.
- c) I think it’s important to say that this is a child protection issue, not only an educational technology issue. Quite often schools regard things like online safety and cyberbullying as being the province of the educational technology

staff. Actually, they should be concerns of **everyone** in the school, and part of an overall child protection strategy that includes offline as well as online safety.

**Objection #2: Concerns over students' behaviour or language in blogs, including cyberbullying**

Solutions:

a) Cyberbullying has already been mentioned. Behaviour is a school behaviour policy issue, and ought to be dealt with under that heading. This isn't because of demarcation issues as such, but because it's important that all staff in the school reinforce acceptable standards of behaviour. As soon as you allow something like this to be classified as ICT or educational technology, other staff tend to think it no longer has anything to do with them.

b) Blogs in school can be moderated by the teacher or a senior student. However, this doesn't address the problem of bullying via mobile phone. This is why it is so important for there to be a school policy in place, not merely on paper but one which pervades school life. For example, the possible consequences of mobile or cell phone abuse should be discussed in citizenship or social studies lessons. Ultimately, there has to be a school ethos in which most students would not dream of engaging in **any** kind of bullying, and that is a whole school challenge, not just yours!

**Objection #3: Concerns about washing dirty laundry in public**

Solutions:

a) Make sure there is a forum for students to discuss their concerns, such as a staff-student forum. Most people will only complain in public if there is no effective procedure to allow them to complain in private, or if nothing seems to happen when they do.

b) Take the attitude that if people are complaining, it's because they care. So, take notice of what they say and try and deal with it.

**Objection #4: It's just a distraction – we're here to address the standards**

Solution:

Draw up a grid showing how the characteristics of blogging and so on can address the expectations embedded in the standards.

OK, now let's turn to the positive side of the coin.

**The 7 proactive things you can do to enlist the support of senior management [53:17]**

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As I stated earlier, you won't go too far wrong if you take the view that everyone acts in their own self-interest. So, what is the self-interest of senior management? Usually it is an altruistic self-interest of wanting the school to achieve well and meet its aims, and be thought well of in the local community. With that in mind, here goes:

**1. Research**

Gather research which shows the benefits of blogging in terms of grade scores or personality development (for example, shy children finally finding a way to contribute to class discussions). Summarise the findings on no more than a side of paper.

**2. Help your colleagues**

Prepare a paper showing how blogging might be useful in various subjects.

### 3. Objection analysis

Sit down, preferably with someone else, and do a thorough objection analysis. As you now know, that means, try to think of all the possible objections that the manager may raise, and deal with them. For example, the manager may say, "What if someone posts inappropriate comments, anonymously?". You might respond by saying that no anonymous comments will be allowed, and that all comments will be moderated anyway. Incidentally, you should do the same thing with network issues too, so that when the network manager expresses concern about security, or overloading the system, you have your answer ready. One effective approach here is to find a school which has a similar set-up to yours, so that you can suggest that the technical staff at your school contact their counterparts at the other school to find out how they dealt with the concerns raised.

### 4. Make the school's issues your issues

Prepare a paper showing how blogging can help the school to meet its own, or externally-imposed, aims. In the UK, for example, all schools have to address something called Every Child Matters, one of the aspects of which is that children should make a positive contribution. Well, set up in the right way, blogging certainly facilitates that, especially for those who feel sick at the thought of saying something in a class discussion.

### 5. Plan a pilot

Work out how you could set up a small pilot group to start with. So, when the manager says, "I'm still not convinced...", you can say, "How about if I try it out with group X? They're a nice bunch, and it will give us an opportunity to see what issues come up and deal with them." This solution might be especially effective with a group of students who are somewhat outside the scope of the mainstream fare, such as children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, learning difficulties, are extremely bright, or who do not have English as their first language.

### 6. Keep 'em informed

Once the manager has said "Yes", that isn't the end of the matter. You need to keep them informed about how it's going. From their point of view, they have taken a risk, so you need to reassure them. Mentioning how the blogging is going in your report to the Governing Body, newsletter to parents, staff bulletin is very important -- as is bursting into the principal's office every so often with a great anecdote about what happened yesterday as a result of the blogging activity! It's not a bad idea either to give the Principal the information in such a way as to let him make it more widely known -- and take some of the credit!

### 7. Get 'em involved

In the longer term, it's good to get the active involvement of the headteacher and other staff. If they are seen doing it, especially the senior managers, it is seen as important and necessary. In fact, if the senior managers are really reluctant to allow blogging, a good way through the impasse is to offer to set up a blog that they can contribute to. If they perceive this as unnecessary and a waste of time, offer to subscribe them to a blog that might be of interest to them, or even to produce a weekly summary of important discussion points that come up in the blog.

You could also offer to include them in the pilot blog so they can be a visible presence and can also monitor what is happening first-hand. If they won't hear of it, then make sure that in any report you **do** give them there is an extract or quotation from a respectable blogger, preferably one who has a similar role or level of responsibility, eg Principal. You might argue that you never have to produce any reports, but doing so is all part of selling educational technology in the school. You may think you don't need to do that, but you do, although there isn't time in this presentation to go into this. It's something I cover a lot in other materials on my website.

#### **The 4 reasons that a supportive management is not always a good thing [58:08]**

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I mentioned earlier that the ideal situation is to have an actively and proactively supportive senior management, but there are sometimes difficulties in having a supportive manager.

##### **Difficulty #1: A little knowledge is a dangerous thing**

This is also known, by me at least, as the well-meaning amateur syndrome. The boss likes to think of himself (this type is usually male) as a bit of a techie, and is constantly coming along to you to suggest that you buy this or that gizmo.

Now, to be honest, this isn't a terrible problem. In fact, sometimes it can even be helpful because he may have read something that you missed. But it can become distracting.

An effective solution is to set up a small working party of perhaps 3 or 4 people, including your boss, who are interested in such things and can suggest ideas and thrash them out before a final commitment is made.

##### **Difficulty #2: Two heads are not always better than one**

This is a more extreme version of difficulty #1: the Principal actually orders the kit, or instructs someone to order it, because he read somewhere that it's really good.

Both of these difficulties are symptomatic of a lack of implementing proper processes for managing the technical support for educational technology. What needs to be established is a clear delineation of who does what. In simple terms, the Principal and other non-technical staff (which presumably includes you because you are a teacher) should be concerned only with functional specifications. In other words, your role and their role is to specify what you'd like the equipment to do, or what you'd like the staff and students to be able to do with it. It is then up to the technical support staff to work out the technical specifications that will not only deliver the desired outcomes but which will also be compatible with existing systems.

##### **Difficulty #3: Are we nearly there yet?**

You know how children are on a long journey? Every 5 minutes they ask if we're nearly there yet. Well, some headteachers are like that. Their enthusiasm is so great that they can't wait for the next great result. It's important to make sure that good practice is built up on solid foundations, but that takes time. If you've been authorised to spend a lot of money, or if the management has decided to give you some leeway to develop your ideas and put them into practice, you will need to make sure they don't lose patience and either pull the plug on the project or create difficulty number 4. A useful device for avoiding this kind of scenario is to draw up a timeline showing what can reasonably be expected to

be achieved by when. In fact, you might even consider adopting a project management approach including time-related milestones and the like.

I think the best way of handling this enthusiasm is to make sure you achieve a series of quick wins on a continual basis, and celebrate them. To be honest, it's a good idea to do that anyway in my opinion, because it creates a buzz. In one school I worked in, I took the educational technology from a low status subject which was used as a kind of sink for students rejected from other courses, to one which was so popular that new staff and facilities had to be paid for, in the space of two years. And a lot of that was because of the buzz I was able to generate.

Obviously, the buzz has to be based on real achievements, otherwise all you're doing is spouting hot air – and you'll be found out quickly enough.

Quick wins can include things like boys starting to get enthusiastic about writing, behaviour starting to improve, students commenting about each other's work and starting to be more collaborative in general and other anecdotal evidence. These can be celebrated by having a special area of your room, or the corridor outside your room, or perhaps even the staffroom, devoted to a bulletin board of what's been happening – which will need to be kept up-to-date, of course.

#### **Difficulty #4: Everybody's doing it**

This is where the headteacher is so sold on the idea that she decrees that everyone has to do it, starting next Monday. You get the same thing with equipment, like the headteacher I heard of recently who decreed that she wanted to see the interactive whiteboards in all the classrooms being used all the time.

The fact of the matter is, it is not always appropriate, and in any case there are staff training implications. Besides, the last thing you want is a bunch of colleagues feeling resentful because they've already got enough to do. The trouble is, when teachers are really antagonistic towards something, their attitude tends to come across loud and clear to their students. But even if none of these considerations applies, there is one practical issue: how are you going to quality control the work of so many teachers? It's possible to do so, but it has to be planned for properly.

#### **Four tactics for getting a supportive administration working with you rather than against you [1:03]**

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This isn't rocket science, just common sense.

##### **Tactic #1: Make sure that all your original expectations are met**

For example, don't let students' work go unmarked because you're spending so much time implementing web 2 practices. Either set your sights lower, or negotiate to have extra time or assistance.

##### **Tactic #2: Make sure that standards are maintained, if not improved**

No activity should be undertaken for its own sake, but because of its expected impact on learning and achievement. As mentioned earlier, you need to relate the activity to the local or national standards by which the students are going to be assessed.

**Tactic #3: Keep accurate records of what was tried and what the outcomes were**

This can be quite simple, such as notebook or electronic document with four columns: Date; What was tried; What was the outcome; What should be done differently next time.

**Tactic #4: Make sure that whoever needs to be kept informed is kept informed**

**Three things to do if blogging or social networking and so on has already been banned [1:06]**

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We have heard of schools, and even whole districts, banning students from blogging. This is a great pity, because blogging can have so many advantages from a teaching and learning point of view.

But what causes this sort of reaction, and what can you, the ICT or educational technology leader in the school, do about it?

In a sense, if the senior management team have banned blogging, then you are too late. At least, your job of getting blogging accepted is going to be that much more difficult, for two reasons:

Firstly, inertia: decisions tend to get changed more slowly than they are made. In this case, edicts will have gone out, procedures established for detecting and then dealing with student bloggers. Once systems are put into place to make sure something happens or doesn't happen, it is extremely difficult to change the system.

Secondly, the more senior the person making the decision, the more difficult it is to have the decision rescinded, because of the perceived loss of face that accompanies that.

So, even before you attempt to convince senior management – or anybody else – of the benefits of a particular thing you should be doing general promotional work on the service you offer.

If blogging has already been banned in your school there is no point in adopting antagonistic tactics such as organising a staff petition, shouting in staff meetings or, worst of all, washing your dirty linen in public. Given that your aim is to have the decision reversed as soon as possible, you should use any or all of the following:

Find out who was behind the ban. Was it the headteacher, or was it parental pressure? You need to know this because you need to direct your efforts where they will have the most effect. That does not necessarily mean dealing with the "opposition" head on.

For example, if you discover that the headteacher thinks, or has a vague feeling, that blogging is OK, but was forced into banning it in order to placate parents worried about their children's safety online, it would be more effective to give the headteacher ammunition than to wage the battle yourself. Thus, bringing in new, more robust online protection mechanisms (which is NOT the same as saying more stringent controls!), and giving the headteacher the concomitant assurances, might be a better way forward than addressing a meeting of the Parents' Association.

Secondly, find out why the ban was put in place. This is partly covered in the preceding point, but it's worth exploring in greater depth. Usually, people are concerned about online safety and too much freedom of speech: what if the students "bad mouth" the school?

Well, as I said earlier, the answer to the second is that they will do so anyway if they are going to do it at all, and so maybe it's better to have them do it in an environment where the students' concern can be channelled.

For example, perhaps an internal blog could be set up that acts as a barometer of student issues that could then be dealt with, say in a student-staff council. That has potential educational benefits too, and the worst excesses can be controlled through moderation and discussion centring on what is, and what is not, acceptable behaviour in an online forum.

Another option that has been tried successfully in some areas is to change the name of the activity to something more socially acceptable, such as web logging instead of blogging.

Thirdly, think long term. Gather research evidence about the benefits of blogging. But be clever about it: you need to compare like with like. If you're working in a school in the middle of a large urban deprived area, it's no use finding out what they've been doing in a top private school. Nobody will listen.

None of these recommendations is easy, and success is by no means guaranteed. But they are absolutely necessary.

I hope you found this presentation useful. Please complete the feedback questionnaire at <http://terry-freedman.org.uk/db/k12online/>. Thank you.

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#### Podcast notes

Intro music: One of these days, by Barry McCabe, from <http://podsafesaudio.com/>, released under a Creative Commons Licence.

Transition and outro music: Simple Soulman by The Groovebusters. The music is under a Creative Commons licence. Hear the band at:

<http://www.garageband.com/song?|pe1|S8LTM0LdsaSkYFexYGE>

"Bullet points" were taken from Electronicfx1.mp3, which is shipped with CastBlaster.

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#### Acknowledgements

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#### Other reading



Check out [Coming of Age: An Introduction to the NEW Worldwide Web](http://www.ictineducation.org/db/web2). First edition: <http://www.ictineducation.org/db/web2>. 2nd Edition (in progress): <http://web2booklet.blogspot.com>.